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ABSTRACT

This program offers assistance in developing a workshop on assertiveness training for students. It discusses how assertiveness helps one learn self-control and take responsibility for one's own behavior. Examples of assertive and non-assertive behavior and exercises to increase assertiveness are delineated as they relate to classroom skills, career development, and personal life. (Author/JAC)

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ASSERTIVENESS TRAINING: A COMMUNICATION KEY

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Abstract

Assertiveness training helps one to learn control of oneself and to take responsibility for one's own behavior. It is a useful and rewarding communication skill.

This workshop covers two general areas:

1) A brief discussion of assertiveness and its utility examples of assertiveness and non-assertive behavior, and specific ways to increase one's assertiveness.

2) How to teach students to become more assertive.

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Introduction

Have you ever bought something you didn't want because you felt obligated to the sales person?

Have you ever felt manipulated in a conversation?

Do you say "I'm sorry" a good deal of the time when you don't really mean it?

When you receive a compliment do you usually discount it?

If someone criticizes you unjustly, do you usually walk away angry and upset rather than verbally defend yourself?

Is it hard for you to compliment or praise others?

Have you ever greatly inconvenienced yourself by running errands, lending money, or the like, so that others will think you are "nice"?

Is it difficult for you to speak up in a large meeting?

Are you vague about your personal and career goals?

If you answer "yes" to any of these statements, assertiveness training may be of interest to you.

Assertiveness training is one of the latest entries into the communication skills inventory--and it is surely one of the most useful. It is, basically, learning to express your needs and feelings in a straightforward way. It is behaving in an "I'm ok, you're ok" manner. Most persons see assertive behavior as rewarding behavior.

What is assertiveness?

Behavior can be categorized in many ways. When we talk about assertive behavior, it often clarifies the discussion to put behaviors into three very general classifications: passive, aggressive, and assertive. Describing the results of these behaviors is useful:

Passive behavior ("You're ok, I'm not ok") helps you to:

1. avoid conflict
2. avoid responsibility (you can blame others)
3. avoid risks
4. if female, be socially recognized as feminine
5. have people like you because you meet their needs
6. avoid taking care of yourself and avoid independance
7. avoid making decisions

Aggressive behavior (I'm ok, you're not ok") helps you to:

1. get your needs met
2. maintain distance (others can't get too close to you)
3. maintain your fantasy about being in control

Assertive behavior ("I'm ok, you're ok") helps you to:

1. feel better physically because you're not holding back or in
2. feel competent
3. own responsibility; behave like an adult; increase your independence.
4. become more open and honest; have more open relationships
5. give others chances to change their behaviors
6. be more likely to get your needs met
7. decide what's important to you
8. determine the direction of your life with skill and confidence

It's important to understand that assertive behavior is not aggressive behavior, nor does one become aggressive if one increases one's assertiveness. The truly assertive person is not a loud, overbearing, pushy, back-slapping, inconsiderate, compulsive talker. Quite the opposite. Assertive persons respect the rights of others as well as their own. They are friendly and outgoing, but they don't impose on others. They are not afraid to express themselves, but they also listen well. Assertive people are able to choose appropriate behaviors for different situations. They are responsible for their feelings and behavior. "Assertiveness is the ability to express the full range of your thoughts and emotions with confidence and skill."[1]

Another way to define the assertive person is to describe personality characteristics:

S/he feels free to reveal himself or herself. Through words and actions, s/he makes the statement, "This is me. This is what I feel, think, and want." This person has a clear, positive self-image.

S/he can communicate with people on all levels--with strangers, friends, family. This communication is open, direct, honest, and appropriate.

S/he has an active orientation to life. S/he goes after what s/he wants. In contrast to the passive person who waits for things to happen, s/he attempts to make things happen.

S/he acts in a way s/he respects. Aware that one cannot always win, s/he accepts unavoidable limitations. However this person always strives to make the good try, so that win, lose, or draw, s/he maintains self-respect.[3]

I'm convinced that effective communication is essential to the success of any relationship. To communicate successfully, one needs a repertoire of behaviors from which to choose--i.e., you do not become locked into repeating the same, old, undesirable behaviors. Assertiveness provides a new option for many of us. It is a balance between passive and aggressive behavior, a balance between your needs and the needs of others. It allows you more choices--to choose the most effective way to communicate.

Assertiveness is a skill, or rather a series of skills, which can be learned. The goal of assertion is control of, and responsiblity for, one's behavior. "Assertive training is based on the theory that our social behavior is learned and that therefore it can be unlearned and replaced by new, more rewarding behavior."[3]

There's nothing new in being responsible for your own feelings and behaviors--what is new is being able to identify skills that one can learn so that one can acquire new and more rewarding behaviors.

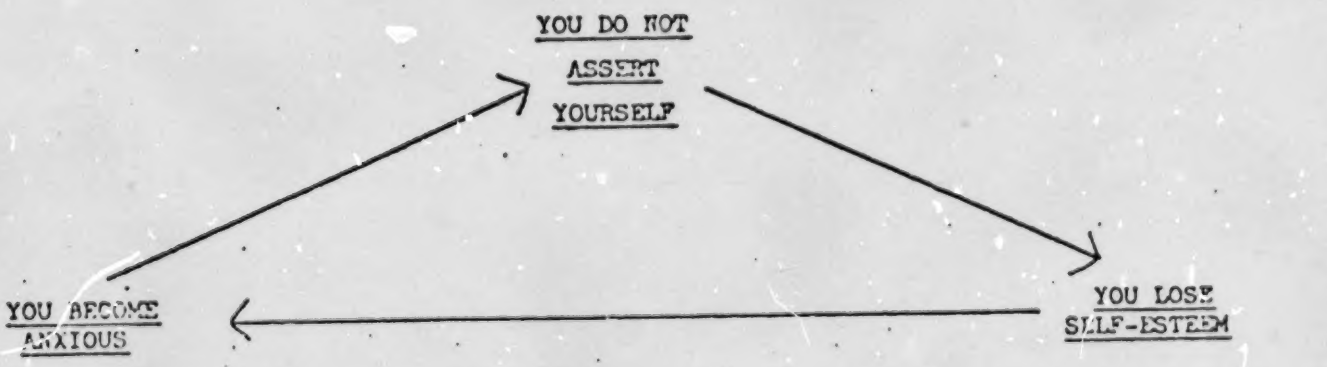
Increasing your assertiveness

In the materials that follow, you will find a variety of suggestions for skill building. Some will mean more to you than others, of course. Certainly you will want to read furthur if you believe that assertiveness training is for you. Review the bibliography for suggestions.

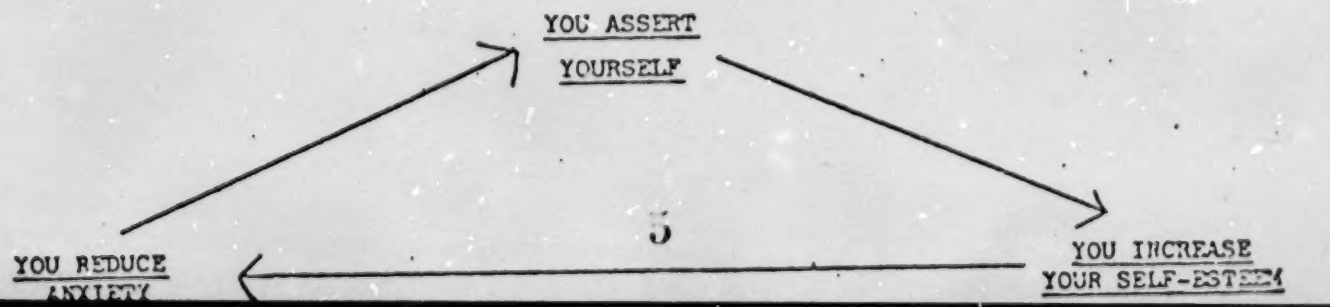
All the exercises, suggestions, and plans that follow are simply variations of step-by-step skill building. Some start with simple actions; others demand more introspection and thought.

Assertiveness training is not only reading, writing, and listening. It demands involvement <u>from</u> you to be successful <u>for</u> you. Try these suggestions, or look for others that better suit you. Remember, the assertive person has an active orientation to life!

THE NON-ASSERTIVE CYCLE



THE ASSERTIVE CYCLE



To start off, here are some rights, and corresponding responsibilities, of the assertive person:

1. You have the right to be treated with respect.

   You have the responsibility to treat others with respect.

2. You have the right to have and express your own feelings.

   You are responsible for your own feelings.

3. You have the right to be listened to and taken seriously.

   You have the responsibility to listen to others and to take them seriously.

4. You have the right to make mistakes.

   You have the responsibility to be accepting of others' mistakes.

5. You have the right to say "I don't know."

   You have the responsibility of not expecting others to always have the answers either.

6. You have the right to say "no" without feeling guilty.

   You have the responsibility of not making others feel guilty for saying "no" to you.

7. You have the right to ask for what you want.

   You have the responsibility to respect the right of others to ask for what they want too.

8. You have the right to get what you pay for.

   You have the responsibility to clarify terms before agreeing to a contract and to live up to the terms of the contract.

9. You have the right to choose not to assert yourself; sometimes the risk isn't worth the gain, and sometimes you're just too tired!

Suggestions for Increasing Your Assertiveness

1. Say good morning for seven days to each person you see every morning. Don't expect a response, just say good morning.

2. Make a point to do one task; call a friend, repair something, finish a project--just do something you have been putting off.

3. If someone does something to make you very happy or very angry, tell the person.

4. Join the Compliment Club. This simply involves paying honest compliments to the people around you. Pay one compliment per day to each of at least three friends or relatives; it is perfectly okay to praise casual acquaintances or even strangers. Paying compliments is simply taking a positive attitude about part of the world around you.

5. Set some goals. Start thinking about some specific career and personal goals; write them down. What do you want to have accomplished by the end of this year? By the end of the next year? In three to five years?

6. At the next social gathering you attend, introduce yourself to a stranger and chat for a few minutes.

7. Next time you need something, ask for it directly, without apologizing or explaining at length.

8. Avoid saying "I'm sorry." Instead state the facts of the situation: "Yes, you're right, I forgot the book," or "yes, I am late."

9. Start a diary or log book on assertive behavior. Each day record situations in which you:
   a. responded assertively
   b. "blew it"
   c. avoided confronting the situation altogether.

   When were you passive, aggressive, assertive? Can you see any pattern? How did you feel afterwards? What could you have done differently?

10. Review and become sensitive to nonverbal behavior--your own and others. Use direct eye contact, look serious, use appropriate gestures, facial expression, tone of voice. Use videotape, if you can, to check out behaviors.

11. Use the attached "Plan for Increasing Your Repertoire of Assertive Behaviors."

12. Find some books and articles in the bibliography that interest you and read them.

13. Practice!

A Plan for Increasing Your Repertoire of Assertive Behaviors*

1. Define the problem(s) clearly. List several situations in which you express yourself non-assertively.

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. From this list on non-assertive behaviors, pick three that bother you the most. How did you learn to behave this way?

Behavior I._____

_____

_____

Why do I behave this way?

a. I never learned a better alternative. _____

b. I was rewarded for behaving non-assertively. _____

c. I was punished for being assertive. _____

d. I always believed this was the way I should behave. _____

Behavior II. _____

_____

_____

Why do I behave this way?

a. I never learned a better alternative. _____

b. I was rewarded for behaving non-assertively. _____

c. I was punished for being assertive. _____

d. I always believed this was the way I should behave. _____

Behavior III._____

Why do I behave this way?

a. I never learned a better alternative. _____

b. I was rewarded for behaving non-assertively. _____

c. I was punished for being assertive. _____

d. I always believed this was the way I should behave. _____

3. From your list of non-assertive behaviors, choose one that exemplifies an important area of communication in your life, such as expressing anger, expressing love, asking for financial help, discussing sex, becoming upset by a particular person, being uncomfortable around persons of different sex, religions, or ethnic backgrounds, being uncomfortable in certain settings, etc.

The behavior:_____

_____

The area it exemplifies:_____

_____

_____

4. Defining the problem behaviorally:

Who does the problem involve (which person(s) or group(s))?_____

_____

In what circumstances does it occur (time, place, etc.)?_____

_____

_____

What specific behaviors of yours are unsatisfying (giggle, slump, change of subject, avoid eye contact, don't speak up, apologize, over react, talk too much, etc.)_____

_____

_____

5. GOALS:

What specific way(s) do I want to behave in this situation?_____

6. Solving the problem behaviorally:

Exactly what will I do in order to accomplish my goals? (Describe the specific behaviors.)

*Adapted in part from suggestions in Confidence in Communication; A guide to Assertive and Social Skills by Ronald B. Adler

A Plan for Career Development

1. I have the following skills which are useful on the job market: _____
_____
_____
_____

2. I have the following job-related goals: _____
_____
_____
_____

3. Based upon an analysis of my skills and goals, I would like the following to be my next position: _____
_____

4. In order to successfully compete for this position, I need to develop/ acquire the following skills and knowledge:

a. _____
b. _____
c. _____
d. _____
e. _____

5. Can I get the experience and development I need in my present job?

6. Are my goals and values compatible with the policies and opportunities of my present company?
If not, can my goals be modified accordingly?

7. Can I get the necessary training I need?

a. Are there company training programs?
b. Can I afford the time and money for more formal education?
c. Is self-development (i.e., professional periodicals, clubs and organizations, books, etc.) sufficient?

8. This is what I plan to do this year to prepare myself for my desired job:

a. _____
b. _____
c. _____
d. _____
e. _____
f. _____

Practicing an Active Orientation to Life:

Setting and Accomplishing Realistic Goals

	PERSONAL GOALS	CAREER GOALS
Immediate		
Secondary		
Long Range		

ASSERTIVENESS TRAINING, LOCUS OF CONTROL AND SPECIAL PROGRAMS' STUDENTS

What is "locus of control?"

Taking responsibility for one's own behavior. (Internals believe they have some control over their destinies. Externals believe their outcomes are directed by agents or factors outside themselves.)

What is the relationship of locus of control to assertiveness?

An assertive person controls himself or herself; s/he an active orientation to life; s/he demonstrates a high degree of internality.

What are the characteristics of an internally oriented, assertive person?

1. Higher self concept
2. Generally better adjusted
3. More independent
4. More achieving
5. More realistic in expectations
6. More open to new learning
7. More creative
8. More flexible
9. More self-reliant
10. Shows more initiative and effort in controlling the environment
11. Less anxious
12. Has higher grades
13. Shows more interest in intellectual and achievement matters

etc.

The externally oriented, non-assertive person is on the negative side of these characteristics.[4]

What causes externality?

"...externality is due to failure in the past and inexperience with efficient methods of producing change."[5]

Why is the concept of locus of control significant for the classroom?

"If a person does not see the contingencies between his own behavior and reinforcements, he will learn less, exert less control over his environment and therefore his own life. A student who has an external locus of control does not see, or is not willing to see, the relationship between his studying and the grade he receives on the final--he refuses to take responsibility for his grade--the teacher gave him a C."[5]

Can locus of control be measured?

The Nowicki-Strickland Internal-External Scale is a validated instrument. The survey contains 40 items written on a fifth-grade level. The higher the score, the more external the person.

Improving Student Motivation by John E. Roueche and Oscar Mink is an excellent source. It contains a copy of the questionnaire, and an explanation of the scoring and validation.

What are some techniques an instructor can use to increase his/her student's internality?

1. All criteria for success in a course should be spelled out clearly.

2. Don't tell students they won't do well in your course.

3. Establish clear behavioral objectives.

4. Have individualized learner-oriented instructions as much as possible. (See pp. 25-35 in Improving Student Motivation for more information.)

5. Allow the student to assess his/her own skills, attitudes, etc. (For example, a Self Assessment Questionnaire was developed in the Special Services Program at Jefferson Community College--attached.)

6. Help the student recognize his/her responsibility in the learning process. What are the alternatives to his/her present behavior? Are those alternatives behaviors worth the effort? Is there any pay-off for changing?

7. Reinforce statements indicating responsibility and internality. ("I failed the test." "I will get that book." "I want to be sure of the meeting time." "I'll meet you at 9:00 tomorrow.")

8. Help students establish a list of specific actions that will lead to a goal, such as better test grades. For instance, see "Plan for Increasing Your Repetoire of Assertive Behaviors."

9. If the learning steps are too difficult for the students, break them down.

10. Examine your entire course. Is it appropriate for the students who will take the course? Have an expert teacher evaluate your teaching skills. Consider the Teaching Improvement Process.

11. Set up as many self-evaluation situations as possible so the student will have the opportunity to feel in control.

12. At all times reinforce the idea that success is due to the student's efforts.

13. Practice non-evaluative listening. Encourage your students to express themselves clearly.

14. Discuss specific, appropriate classroom behavior with the students. They are often taken for granted by teachers, but when students are alerted to behaviors considered appropriate by instructors, and actually discover that by adopting these behaviors they improve communication with the instructor, they increase internality. (See "Classroom Behaviors")

"In a real sense, locus of control promises more potential for targeting remedial action with students than any other single learning variable. Locus of control is clearly one dimension of the philosophical struggle between fatalism and free will. Students who feel powerless to change the direction of their lives are unlikely to try. They don't try because they do not believe they can. In a real sense, the motivation to achieve is present."[7]

Classroom Behaviors

Some students are more likely than others to use these negative communication patterns in the classroom:

1. ask irrelevant, trite questions
2. smile at inappropriate times
3. have blank, neutral, expressionless facial expressions
4. look out the window, at the wall, or at the floor
5. look bored, inattentive
6. neglect to take notes; not have pencil and paper
7. sit with slumping, non-alert posture
8. follow the teacher's instructions slowly, partially, or incorrectly
9. not raise hands to ask questions
10. not maintain eye contact with the instructor
11. come late to class; walk in front of lecturer to reach seat
12. talk, pop gum, comb hair, do nails, etc.

By discusing these behaviors with the student(s), and indicating <u>why</u> the behaviors are seen negatively by instructors, you can help the student set up simple behavior goals. As the student changes his or her behavior, s/he can nearly always see more positive reactions towards him or her by the instructors involved. This increases the student's awareness that s/he can, indeed, be responsible for at least some events in his or her life. The location of control for one's life becomes more internal.

Notes

1 Ronald Adler. Confidence In Communication. p. 6.

2 Dr. Lynn Bloom, et al. "The New Assertive Woman," Family Circle, November, 1975.

3 Herbert Fensterheim. Don't Say Yes When You Want To Say No. p. 20.

4 John Roueche, et al. Improving Student Motivation, p. 10.

5 Ibid, p. 13.

6 Ibid, p. 12.

7 Ibid, pp. 20-21.

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